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The True Story of Yankee Doodle

BY

PETER GUY

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The True Story of Yankee Doodle

By Peter Guy

Come around, all you folks who are anxious to crack
The toughest of nuts, here's a test for your noodle,—
Pray tell us if ever a man, white or black,
Has discovered that hero, the real Yankee Doodle?

Who can tell how he looks, where he lives, what he wears;
Whether red, white or black, whether brown, green or yellow?
Has he whiskers or not? Are his features in pairs?
Who has been to the home of this wonderful fellow?

I'm surprised! No one answers. What's wrong? Can it be
That you all have been whistling his tune for so long,
Without knowing this sprite? So it seems. Then to me
Falls the pleasure of telling his story in song.

Yankee Doodle is not, as so many suppose,
Just a rollicking ragamuffin running around;
But in fact (as I learned from a person who knows)
He's a Woodle, a sprite, with a wisdom profound.

In the days long ago, when our great Earth was new;
Every land had its hero, its giant or sprite.
In old England was Puck, and the Greeks had a few,
While in Egypt was Gollywog (he was a fright).

But to us was assigned Yankee Doodle, the bold,
With his long, pointed features, the twang in his voice,
And his slim lanky figure. He came, we are told,
Just to please Peter Pan, not because 'twas his choice.

When he came to this land of the Brave and the Free,
All he found was a wilderness, peopled with bears,
And with wild cats, and wolves, everywhere he could see;
And that beast that a hump on his back always wears.

Not a white man around, nor a brown man nor red.
Only beasts of the forest and birds of the air
To serve him for company. So, it is said,
He just went right among them, and made his home there.

But before I relate more about what he did,—
How he labored for ages without thought of pelf,
And endeavored to cure what he could not forbid,—
You should know more about Yankee Doodle's own self.

He is lanky and slim and he's not very tall,—
Just about like a boy I should say as to size—
He has sharp, pointed features; his hair I would call
The color of brick dust, and greenish blue eyes.

He is full of sly pranks, and he loves to play tricks
On the solemn old hypocrites, posing as saints.
He is roguish and gay, and is happy to mix
With the children, and play, and abandon restraints.

But his heart is as strong and as tender and true
As the heart of your mother. His wisdom is sound.
He believes in mankind. He is fond of the crew
Of plain honest people, wherever they're found.

I have said he's a Woodle, and that, you should know,
Is a kind of good spirit or hero or god.
He was known when the first flower started to grow,
And he'll stay till the last flower sprouts in the sod.

You all know, I suppose, that a being like this
Can take on any shape, or keep out of your sight.
He does not have to eat. He is willing to miss
All his meals for a month. He does not sleep at night.

He can flit in a wink to a place miles away
By just wishing to be there (all sprites can do that)
He can stay right around and hear all that you say;
He can come as a rooster, or come as a cat.

He can talk any language of man or of beast.
He is partial to birds, and the eagle's his chum.
He can travel for hours without tiring the least.
You should see the birds fly when he calls them to come.

All who don't think that Woodles and fairies and elves
Have contributed much to the progress of things,
Would better stop here, and go play by themselves,
For from now on pure fancy is given free wings.

Long before any man, with a thought in his head,
Made his home on this earth, there were folks everywhere.
There were giants and ogres and sprites, it is said,
With their homes under ground, on the sea, in the air.

There were beautiful fairies, and princes, and kings;
There were elves, and hobgoblins, and witches, they say;
There were some who had horns; there were some who had wings;
There were imps of the night; there were angels of day.

There was Neptune, the King of the realms of the sea.
There was Hercules—doer of wonderful feats.
Then the Fates claim attention, those grim sisters three,
Whose laws and decrees every one of us meets.

There was Thor with his hammer, and Jove with his bolts
Of dread lightning, displaying the splendor of wrath.
Then we read of Latona, who, tortured by dolts,
Turned the rustics to frogs, hopping out of her path.

All these heroes and deities, fairies and elves;
All these Woodles and wood nymphs and ogres and sprites;
Had the land and the ocean and air to themselves:
Not a creature to question or threaten their rights.

Our good friend Yankee Doodle (a stranger to fame),
Never mentioned in classical story or song;
Though his name doesn't show, he was there just the same:
His achievements will fill the whole world before long.

All who read of the mythical people of old
Have observed, what philosophers always have known,
That 'twas kings, queens and princes who governed the fold;
That the will that was law was the will of the throne.

Yankee Doodle was always a rebel at heart,
When compelled to endure the dominion of kings.
"In our common affairs every one should take part,"
Was his creed, and he sought a new order of things.

The Woodles, you know, were related by birth
To the Titans of Chaos, the children of Time,
And our friend, by his rank, was a person of worth,
And entitled to notice by beings sublime.

But his novel contention that all should be free;
That the chance to progress should be equal to all;
Made his cousins and relatives mad as could be,
And they straightway began to arrange for his fall.

They plotted and planned and decreed and contrived;
They agreed to ignore him, if all else should fail;
They concluded to burn him; then, if he survived
And maintained his strange fancies, they'd put him in jail.

In the realms of the beings who rule by main force,
Or divine right of kings, or the edicts of czars,
There's no place for a democrat: So, then, of course,
Our hero must go, or remain behind bars.

Then his friend, Peter Pan, who for centuries past
Had been keeper of forests, suggested the scheme
Of a trip to this wilderness, far in the west,
Where no kings would intrude, and this dreamer could dream.

This explains why in all of the mystical lore,
All the tales of the past, all the books of the dead,
Yankee Doodle has never been featured before,
(Except as a joke—but he lives, as I said).

He approached his new home from the east, and, of course,
Landed somewhere near Boston,—that is, I should say
Near the place where that city, long famed as the source
Of true culture, was born at a much later day.

At first he was lonesome, but soon he began
To make friends with the animals, also the birds.
He had much time to think, and consider a plan,
Which he hoped in the future to write out in words.

For awhile he was bothered by copy cat elves,
And by fairies and near-gods, who knew nothing more
Than to stir up a fuss, and make fools of themselves,
And who followed him here to this faraway shore.

They had known him in Europe; had heard of his breach
With the powers of Olympus, and, thinking he meant
To start a new kingdom, they struggled to reach
His retreat, and to follow wherever he went.

But they tired of the plain, simple life of our friend,
And soon learned that he had no desire to recruit
Such a motley array, neither did he intend
To elect himself king, nor provide any loot.

So they left him. And that is the reason, they say,
Why we never have heard of a fairy or Woodle
Or a goblin or sprite, even down to this day
In this land of the Free, except plain Yankee Doodle.

For a time he amused himself looking around.
He explored the east coast; took a trip to the source
Of the great Mississippi; went wild when he found
The Grand Canon, and spent a few days there, of course.

He went to Yosemite; climbed to the peak
Of Tacoma, that massive, imposing old pile,
That mountain of mountains. Then went on to seek
The rest and seclusion of Maine for awhile.

On his travels he met and conversed with all sorts
Of wild animals, ranging the forests and plains.
He devoted some time to collecting reports
Of volcanoes and earthquakes—their losses and gains.

He became much attached to the birds here and there.
And spent long happy hours with the robins and geese,
But the eagle came in for a far greater share
Of his time than all others combined could release.

With the eagle he made many trips to the sky,
And together they rested on mountain tops gray.
His pet was Old Baldy, whose keen, fearless eye
Shot a challenge to all who might come in his way.

Though the eagle was king of the birds in his haunts,
He used not his power to oppress or destroy.
Though he killed, 'twas to satisfy only his wants;
Save when needing a meal, he would never annoy.

Thus for many long years Yankee Doodle was left
In peaceful seclusion, unvexed by the mob;
Having visions of people, of reason bereft,
Permitting a tyrant to plunder and rob.

He had heard through his friend Peter Pan now and then,
How the world was progressing, and all of the news:—
That the land known as Asia was peopled with men
(Which gave Yankee Doodle a fit of the blues).

He longed to go over and teach them some tricks,
And try out his pet schemes here and there with those men;
But his wisdom and caution forbade him to mix
With those Asians, and get into trouble again.

So it stood. But before many moons rolled around
He was told that those Asians had come to his shore.
He welcomed them; showed them where food could be found,
And told them they need not go back any more.

To relieve curiosity, you should be told
Right away who they were—those strange men from the west.
They had long lived in Asia, had trinkets of gold,
And were visiting 'round in this region so vast.

They were what we call Indians, first of the race
To inhabit this country; the first overflow
Of humanity soon to possess all the space
From Point Barrow to Terra del Fuego, you know.

Yankee Doodle, of course, concealed his own face,
And appeared in their color, and language, and style.
He found them a warlike and prodigal race,
But he thought he could cure them of that after while.

There was one thing he noticed that gave him much care.
He observed that these people, neglecting to save,
Treated all things as common, and each claimed a share,
Taking all he could get, counting not what he gave.

When one lucky hunter came home from the chase
With a deer or a bear, all his kindred and friends
Came trooping around him and camped at his place,
Until all was devoured,—never making amends.

Yankee Doodle is wise, and he saw at a glance
That if those who were thrifty must feed all the shirks,
There was no hope at all that such race would advance,
For the nation that wins is the nation that works.

So he set about teaching them how to respect
The rights of each other, and how to employ
Their time to advantage, and how to select
The things that are helpful from those that destroy.

Many centuries passed but the red men were dense.
They persisted in living in primitive style;
They camped here and there in their wigwams or tents,
And if fishing was good they would stay for awhile.

In one or two cases some bands got ahead,
And began to progress, and show signs of true life,
As in Mexico, or Yucutan, it is said;
But they soon fell a prey to their weakness and strife.

Disappointed and sour, Yankee Doodle declared
He would help them no more, but would tease them instead,
And from then till the day when our own race appeared
He made one merry jest of the life that they led.

He was called Way-ne-bo-zho by some of the bands,
And again as Mah-je-ki-wis—frolicsome lad.
If he came as a maiden with rings on her hands
'Twas Mah-je-ki-kway-wis, the name that he had.

From the north to the south, from the east to the west,
Wherever the Indians went for repose,
Yankee Doodle went also, and gave them no rest,
But amused them and teased them whenever he chose.

Oftentimes he relented, and many a brave
Found his wooing made easy by magical looks.
Then, again, he would come riding high on a wave,
And perform many tricks never found in the books

As the years rolled along he divided his time
Twixt teasing the red men (with help now and then)
And scaling the mountains, to joyfully climb
To the perch of Old Baldy, the Eagle, again.

Once he heard a strange tale of a queer looking band
Which had landed not far from the very same place
Where he himself touched when he came to this land,
And who plainly were not of the Indian race.

He hastened to see them,—concealed from their view.
He found they were white men who spoke funny words,
With gigantic bodies and eyes of pale blue.
They wore welded armor and carried big swords.

They said they were Norsemen, far driven from home;
They claimed to be peaceful and wished nothing more
Than repairs for their vessel, then off they would roam
Far away o'er the ocean, nor turn to this shore.

But repairs there were none and the vessel was wrecked,
So the Norsemen prepared to establish their power.
They gathered the stones and began to erect
At a place now called Newport, a sturdy stone tower.

Yankee Doodle was pleased, and he loitered around
Where the Norsemen were working, pretending to play
But all the time thinking, perhaps he had found
Some minds that would listen to what he might say.

Again he was forced to abandon his schemes,
For the Norsemen just mixed with the Indians and died.
Disappointed, he then laid aside all his dreams
And went with Old Baldy to take a long ride.

Many centuries passed while he idled around
Playing tricks on the natives, and biding the day
When a race would appear, which he knew could be found,
That would work out his fancies in every way.

Just imagine his joy when the natives brought word
That a shipload of people had landed down south
On an island not far from those islands which gird
The big Gulf that extends from the great river's mouth.

He studied them carefully, working in stealth,
But he soon was convinced that they'd never succeed.
They were not seeking homes but were hunting for wealth,
So he left for the north at the top of his speed.

For many long years the Spaniards and Dutch
Roamed around in these parts seeking magic and gold.
They bartered and slaughtered, but didn't help much
Toward making men happy or free, we are told.

But at last there arrived a lone ship load of folks
Who came not to pilfer or barter or rob,
But to seek a safe place, far from tyranny's yokes,
Where they might build their homes without fear of the mob.

Yankee Doodle observed them and knew their desire,
And he felt that among them his notions might thrive;
He had now found a people whose hearts were on fire,
And straightway his spirits began to revive.

He would gladly have met them and poured in their ears
His thoughts of new freedom and rights of mankind,
But he saw that their foolish and bigoted fears
Might lead them to scout him and cast him behind.

For, while they were earnest and God-fearing men,
And believed in equality, justice and right,
Their own persecution had darkened their ken
And made them hate Woodles with all of their might.

So he led them by putting the thoughts in their hearts.
He helped them in action and saved them from harm,
And he cheered when he saw them all playing their parts,
Meeting bravely and fearlessly every alarm.

Now began the most marvelous thing of all time.
Far away in this wilderness, battling with want,
These brave, ardent Pilgrims, with spirit sublime,
Faced the World with a purpose which nothing could daunt.

They took as their motto our hero's own creed,
"In our common affairs every one should take part."
They melted his teachings right into the breed
Till the spirit of justice filled each throbbing heart.

Yankee Doodle was everywhere, guiding each plan,
Trying hard to correct the mistakes that they made.
Stirring deeper the conscience of every man,
Making broader and sure the foundations they laid.

They never had seen him except in their dreams,
But they pictured his kindly and quizzical face,
And his spirit so filled all the land that it seems
To have molded his likeness right into the race.

There was one little problem that caused him much pain,
And that was the way the first settlers began
To act toward the natives. He urged them in vain
To deal with them fairly, as man unto man.

But the settlers were harsh and the natives were proud,
While both were suspicious and quick to offend.
The result was a warfare which cast a dark cloud
O'er the land for three centuries—still there's no end.

Many men first and last have endeavored to tell
How our friend got his name, but they're wrong every one.
It was not the Dutch "jankin," nor Indian yell,
And it came in the simplest way under the sun.

He sometimes appeared to the children, you know,
As a kindly old man, telling stories and jokes.
He was canny and quaint, and they all loved him so,
He became Unkie Doodle to all of the folks.

He laughed when he heard such a snug, cozy name,
And declared he was honored as never before,
But his voice, with its twang, didn't say it the same,
And "Unkie" was "Yankee" from then evermore.

Neither time nor the space will permit me to tell
All the things that he did: How he taught us to use
The ax and the beetle, and rifles as well;
How to make bully pumpkin and mince pies and stews;

How he led expeditions across barren lands,
And taught us inventions to widen our scope;
How he brought men to value the work of their hands,
And to know that in labor the nation must hope;

How in every great crisis, each leading event,
From the day when those Pilgrims embarked for this shore,
Yankee Doodle was present, and knew what it meant,
And tried to make every man true to the core.

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He was present at Concord and Bunker Hill too,
He endured Valley Forge, doing all that he could;
He inspired Nathan Hale; sent Ben Franklin to woo
The French to our cause, knowing well that he would.

Conventions and battles and meetings and fights,
Elections and lawsuits and Sunday schools grave,—
Every contest the colonists waged for their rights
Marked the spread of his creed through the counsel he gave.

So the years rolled around and the people grew strong.
In each little neighborhood right was the rule,
While the law of equality governed the throng,
Making safer the home and the shop and the school.

Yankee Doodle saw settlements grow into States,
And the States form a Union, a Nation of Peers,
Where Freedom and Mercy and Justice are mates,—
The thing he had pictured for thousands of years.

The creed he had cherished—his very own soul,—
He finds now is ruling a world wide domain,
While the Eagle, Old Baldy, the people extol
As our National Emblem, whom none dare enchain.

And this, boys and girls, as the real Yankee Doodle,—
The Spirit and Breath of our national life;
A real living hero, though just a plain Woodle,
Our guide and our counsel through every strife.

Then hail Yankee Doodle, "Unkie" Doodle, our pride!
The soul of our Nation,—let's cheer him again!
May his spirit pervade all the world far and wide,
Forever and ever and ever, Amen!

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